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Turning the analytic gaze on 'us':
The role of authorities in the alienation of minorities

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Abstract

What leads to the alienation and political (dis)engagement of minority groups is a critical question for political psychologists. Recently, research has focussed attention on one particular minority group—Muslims in the West—and on what promotes 'anti-Western' attitudes and behaviour. Typically, the research focus is on factors internal to the individuals or the minority communities concerned. However, we argue this overlooks the ways in which the perspective and practices of the majority group affect minority group members' understandings of who they are and how they stand in relation to the majority. In this paper we examine the social-psychological processes through which authorities' surveillance and intervention affects minority group members' sense of themselves, their relationship to authorities and the wider community. In doing so, we discuss a number of hitherto neglected psychological processes that may contribute to alienation--namely, processes of misrecognition, disrespect, and humiliation. We draw on research conducted with British Muslims to illustrate our argument for widening our analytic focus to give a more dynamic account of alienation and (dis)engagement.

I HOPE the Scots make Muslims feel watched. [] If Muslims get so stroppy about being watched, perhaps it's because they have something to hide - so watch harder.

dumbledoresarmy, Jihad Watch, 2008

Since 9/11 a widening array of authority figures from police officers to teachers, social workers, and so forth are being called upon to keep an eye out for those who may pose a threat to national security. A common complaint from European Muslims is that this is an invitation to treat all Muslims (or those who fit the Muslim stereotype) as suspect (Husband & Alam, 2011; Spalek & Lambert, 2008). The quote above is taken from an islamophobic website and represents an extreme (and no doubt from the perspective of authorities, an unwelcome response) to this call; but nonetheless it serves to underline the point that Muslims have indeed become objects of surveillance. Moreover, numerous reports document the growing frustration within Muslim minorities in the West concerning counter-terrorism policing measures such as stop and search (e.g., Choudhury & Fenwick, 2011; Kundnani, 2009; Pantazis & Pemberton, 2009). These are doubly painful for they both affect individuals directly and send broader messages to wider Muslim and non-Muslim publics. But what remains poorly understood is how and why such measures are problematic, and more particularly, the social psychological processes through which individual experiences of these measures have political ramifications.

We have sought to examine the social-psychological processes through which the actions of authorities as societal representatives may have an impact on minority group members' sense of themselves and of their relationship to authorities and the wider community. More specifically, we have investigated what may lead minority group members (including 'respectable' community leaders who seek to engage with the authorities and who, in turn, the authorities frequently rely upon), to disengage and withdraw their active cooperation and support. This question is rather neglected with most research examining

what may lead the few into extreme forms of violence (Louis, 2009; Richardson, 2006; Taylor & Louis, 2004). Yet, although more prosaic, it is no less important. It is through the withdrawal of conciliatory voices that a space may be created for more strident voices, and some of these may well contend that violence is the only option. Addressing such dynamics has a wider theoretical significance: Most obviously, it reminds us as majority group members of our own role in the production of contexts where the stigmatisation and subsequent alienation of minority group members is one possible outcome. To set the stage for our argument we will briefly sketch a model of alienation and radicalisation in which the analytic gaze falls on the minority (in this case Muslims) and discuss how this model may lead to the surveillance Muslims in the West complain about. We will then elaborate a more dynamic approach in which the analytic gaze is directed towards majority-minority group interactions; and we will discuss a number of hitherto neglected psychological processes of misrecognition and humiliation that may contribute to alienation.

Pathologising the 'other'

The mainstream model of alienation and radicalisation, which informs counter-terrorism efforts in the West, typically locates the problem in 'them', the minority: in their individual-level vulnerability and / or their group-level pathology. For instance, in a recent example of this approach, Kruglanski and colleagues (2009) describe a 'fatal cocktail' of motives for suicide bombers that includes personal factors, ideological factors, and social pressures into an overarching model of a human quest for personal significance. At the heart of this model are individuals who suffer a loss of significance, trauma or humiliation which renders them vulnerable to 'significance-bestowing ideology'. In critical reviews, Crenshaw (2009) and Bloom (2009) emphasise the absence of context and of an understanding of group processes in this work. Most obviously, Crenshaw suggests more attention should be given to the role

of group leaders, social networks, and the group processes involved in the production and dissemination of particular representations of group relations. We agree with many of these observations (and we return to this below). But even in such critiques, the focus tends to remain on ‘them’—on ‘their’ intra-group processes — and less on how the interactions between majority and minority group members create the context within which minority group members deliberate on their fate and what can and should be done.

It would be one thing if these limits to theory were ‘merely’ of academic concern. However, to the degree that such theory informs practice, the significance of such limits should not be underestimated. Within the European Union, the UK (along with the Netherlands) is seen as a ‘pioneer’ of early interventions designed to identify and engage with people at risk of radicalisation (Eijkman & Schuurman, 2011, p.2). To provide just one example, the UK’s Preventing Violent Extremism strategy (HM Government, 2008; Home Office, 2011) has funded a raft of initiatives to build resilient communities; challenge extremist ideology and support ‘mainstream’ voices; and to support those (mostly young) people who have been identified as vulnerable. These initiatives are underpinned by a conceptualisation of the problem in similar terms to the model described above. Indeed, we have described elsewhere (Blackwood, Hopkins and Reicher, 2012b) one intervention – the Workshop to Raise Awareness About Prevent (Home Office, WRAP)— which explains ‘radicalisation’ in terms of a series of personal crises that may leave an individual vulnerable to the influence of manipulative others. This intervention is designed to enlist people working in communities (from security guards in shopping malls to teachers and social workers) in the identification of such vulnerable individuals. Yet, if our gaze is entirely focused on them and on their personal crises and vulnerabilities, then there is no need to question ‘our’ own practices and the wisdom of ‘our’ policy responses.

Turning the gaze on 'us': Analysing the interactions between authorities and minority groups

In the remainder of this paper, we reflect on the practices adopted by those associated with the majority group – especially those who have the power to shape minority group members' experience. In doing so, we want to take seriously a concern that the very interventions authorised (if not actively advocated) by mainstream theories may contribute to the souring of relations: to explain why this may be so; and to consider where political psychology research needs to go from here.

To foreshadow our argument, it is premised on the understanding that a sense of belonging and commitment to society entails shared identity and this is contingent on our being recognized as members of society and accorded due respect (e.g., De Cremer & Blader, 2006; Tyler & Blader, 2000). This notion is central to debates taking place outside of psychology, on the effects of counter-terrorism laws and discourses on the alienation of Muslim communities both directly and via their ideological support for anti-Muslim sentiment (e.g., Jackson, 2007; Madood, 2005; Pentazis & Pemberton, 2009; Poynting & Mason, 2006). These are debates in which we as political psychologists have been relatively silent, and yet our theories have much to offer in explicating the underlying psychological mechanisms. Here, we argue that authorities, as a consequence of their position as societal representatives, play an important role in processes of recognition because they have greater power to define who is and who is not recognized, and importantly, to act on these definitions (Hopkins, Reicher, & Levine, 1997). Indeed, there is considerable research informed by procedural justice theory that is predicated on the understanding that how authorities exercise their power communicates how people are seen by society as a whole (Sunshine & Tyler, 2003); and there is evidence from this research that minorities themselves believe their treatment at the hands of authorities reveals the extent of their inclusion (Talbot & Bose, 2007).

In a British context, ethnic minorities' perceptions of over-policing, and the discriminatory use of 'stop and search' powers, have been the subject of considerable research attention (Cantle, 2001; Metropolitan Police Authority, 2007; Choudhury & Fenwick, 2011; Spalek & Lambert, 2008). Typically, the populations studied are those which Britton (2000) describes as 'criminalized sub-groups' within ethnic minorities (i.e., young, working class males) who as a consequence of more frequent negative interactions with authorities would be expected to have more negative perceptions of police relations. This is also the population who fit the profile of those deemed vulnerable within the counter-terrorism framework. In this paper, we will draw on interview and focus group-based research conducted with more than 50 members of Scotland's Muslim communities in Dundee, Edinburgh, and Glasgow (see Blackwood, Hopkins, & Reicher, 2012a), for a detailed account of the research). The purpose of this research was not to make claims about the incidence of particular events, but to gain insight into the experience and interpretation of encounters with authorities. Accordingly we did not seek a representative sample. We recruited women and men across a range of ages, occupations, and ethnic backgrounds. Our participants included students, homemakers, professionals and business people, and many were active in their Mosques and in the broader community. As part of our research we asked people to tell stories—both good and bad—about their interactions with any form of authority. In keeping with Dixon and colleagues' strictures (Dixon, Durrheim, & Tredoux, 2005) we did not assume which (if any) interactions with authorities would be relevant.

For the most part, people reported positive relations with Scottish authorities and where they referred to negative experiences in their neighbourhoods and workplaces, reported a degree of ambiguity about the relevance of their own Muslim identity in explaining their treatment. Against this broadly positive backdrop we found an exception: a clear and consistent narrative about airports as spaces of anxiety, humiliation, and sometimes fear. This

focus on airports may reflect the composition of our sample, and so we cannot draw conclusions regarding the importance of airport encounters compared with other encounters (e.g., stop and search on the streets). However, it is worth pointing out that people's accounts of these experiences and of the consequences, pointed to psychological processes that are similar to those observed in research on encounters between ethnic working class youth and police (e.g., Fine et al. 2003; Mythen, Walklate, & Khan, 2009).

From the moment of entering an airport, the experience was described by many of our participants as one of being (or perceiving oneself to be) under surveillance. People spoke of the awareness of CCTV cameras and more particularly of mistrustful looks (real or imagined)—not just from airport and security officials, but also from fellow passengers. Moreover, the experience of surveillance was understood in terms of their meta-representations of how Muslims are perceived by the white British majority and by the authorities. These meta-representations were garnered through media reports, social networks, and, in particular, their personal experiences of being pulled aside and questioned—most particularly at airports, but also elsewhere. Time and again, participants related the indignity of being questioned in full view of other passengers; the seemingly irrelevant and misguided questions; the petty discourtesies involved in their treatment (such as loved-ones being kept waiting). But, closer inspection revealed that over and above the experience of these practices (which most non-Muslims would no doubt find annoying) was a concern that these practices communicated much about how one was positioned by authorities and how one's Muslim identity was regarded by them. Specifically, what was distressing was the experience of misrecognition – that is, being treated as outgroup when one didn't see oneself as such. More than this, people were distressed at being seen as a disreputable and dangerous other. And then, to add further injury, they felt humiliated at being unable to resist this unwarranted 'othering'.

Recognition and respect

The degree to which one is judged a member of the national ingroup has enormous implications for one's treatment. Most obviously being judged outgroup can result in negative treatment. Rather less obviously, being judged outgroup can result in one missing out on the everyday benefits that group membership may confer (such as acts of informal helping: Wakefield et al. 2011). For majority group members, national identity is a group membership that is easily taken for granted as they go about their everyday lives (McCrone & Bechhofer, 2010). However, the experience of minorities is often different: they may find themselves being treated in ways that are discrepant with what they expect on the basis of the self-definition as members of the national ingroup. One subgroup of citizens who regularly find their inclusion in the national ingroup questioned is Muslims living in the West (Hopkins & Blackwood, 2011; Kinnvall & Nesbitt-Larking, 2011).

In recent years, the experiences of such groups have prompted renewed interest in the bases for citizenship - what John Crowley (1999) describes as "the dirty politics of boundary maintenance" and -in the rights and obligations citizenship entails (Soysal, 2000). In turn such concerns about national inclusion and the everyday benefits it bestows on those judged ingroup has resulted in renewed interest in Honneth's (1996) argument that social recognition *as an equal* is an *entitlement* of shared group membership and the bedrock of respect (see Renger & Simon, 2011; Wenzel, 2004). The important corollary of such work is the insight that when one is *not* recognized and treated as an equal, this is experienced as disrespectful and as violating one's entitlement and one's dignity as a group member. Closer examination of our data identified three important aspects of such violations.

First, whilst the non-British Muslims we interviewed were often reasonably sanguine about being treated as alien, those who self-defined as British or Scottish were upset at their treatment:

I think that's quite hurtful because you know, we're all born and bred in this country; we're as British as the person standing at passport control at Heathrow Airport is, you know? And it's, it's unfair, it's a form of institutional racism or discrimination. (Male, 30s, youth worker).

This finding - that those who most wished to be regarded as fellow group members and receive the benefits (in terms of fair treatment etc.) were affected by practices that questioned their group membership - is consistent with research concerning the experience of identity denial conducted with a number of ethnic and religious minorities including Asian, African, and Cuban Americans (Cheryan & Monin, 2005; Barlow, Taylor, & Lambert, 2000).

Second, although national identity was critical, other identities signalling one's social standing in British society, were also experienced as being denied or compromised. Thus, participants also reported their distress at how their maturity and respectability as politically moderate, law-abiding, and contributing members of society was not recognised. In speaking of these experiences, some referred to their mature and pragmatic acceptance of the need for greater security measures at airports and even of their having answered the call to work alongside authorities. However, rather than this lessening the affront at being repeatedly stopped and questioned, their sense of their own respectability had the effect of fuelling their frustration and anger. Indeed, closer analysis revealed that what was at stake in such misrecognition was not merely concern about having one's valued identities denied, but a concern to distance oneself from those considered less respectable and perhaps deserving of authorities' scrutiny. So for instance, what pained one "taxpayer" was the notion that he should be treated as a "young sort of teenager or whatever that needs a bit of harsher treatment" (Male, 40s, business-person).

Third and finally, they expressed concerns around inclusivity and the recognition of shared national identity and so of shared rights. But contrary to a discourse of competing

single identities (see McLaughlin, Phillimore, & Richardson, 2011)—where one is either British or Muslim—this did not reflect a lessening of attachment to other identities. Rather, the problem appeared to lie in being seen *only* in terms of one's minority subgroup identity (as Muslim) where that identity was defined so as to exclude one's claims at a superordinate level (see Hopkins, 2011; Hopkins & Blackwood, 2011). That is to say, there was a clear, shared meta-representation that within an airport context, one was categorized as Muslim, and that this category, which our participants themselves perceived as a source of morality and inclusion in British society, was defined as dangerous and 'other' (and was used to warrant their exclusion). Thus, what was distressing was not simply that one was denied one's British identity and respectability whilst being over-defined by one's Muslim identity: what was also critically at stake was people's ability to define what particular identities mean to them and to be treated in accordance with their self-definitions.

In sum, the experiences people described entailed treatment that was felt to be demeaning and contrary to their expectations about how they, as fine, upstanding members of the community and as good British citizens should be treated. We can see that it is precisely because people have been inculcated in British culture and see themselves as contributing members of society, that they have expectations of being treated with respect and in accordance with British standards and norms. We can, therefore, also understand people's distress as arising from a mismatch between these expectations and reality, and importantly, from what this signals about their inclusion in the group. But exclusion was not the full story; what was painful was the imposition of a definition of their identity that people themselves did not recognize (i.e., Muslim and therefore dangerous) and the demeaning and disempowering treatment that ensued.

Humiliation

The notion of humiliation is central to accounts of Islamist political struggle (Fattah & Fierke, 2009) and in recent years the role that misrecognition by societal representatives plays in humiliation has received some attention. Indeed, Neuhausser (2011) presents the experience of Muslims in airports as an illustrative case of what he describes as *direct group humiliation*. Consistent with common definitions of humiliation and with what constitutes humiliating practice, Neuhausser explains that humiliation is not just associated with the transgression of expectations of being treated fairly and with respect, but also with people's sense of their powerlessness in public. As he puts it:

Consider that these people are singled out just because of their religion and see in the eyes of all other people from whom they are separated the fearful question: Are you a terrorist? This clearly has to count as a humiliation, because these persons are not judged for what they are but for the worst anybody could be and they have no way of telling the other customers: Look, this is just a weird misunderstanding. (Neuhausser, 2011, p. 22).

Post 9/11, the power asymmetry between airport authorities and the travelling public could not be clearer. For those who fit a Muslim stereotype this power asymmetry has a distinctive quality. Feeling 'othered', their powerlessness is clear: As one of our participants observed, to claim one's rights and object to one's treatment would be to risk being "locked up in jail or prison for sixty days, potentially be taken to Guantanamo" (Male, 20s, youth worker).

But as we have noted above, it is not merely the perception of the authorities' practical power that is important. One's powerlessness is also symbolic and can be experienced as confirming one's marginality as a group member. Moreover, the symbolism of one's lack of power can be keenly felt. Thus being publicly stopped and set aside from others can be especially painful because one's status amongst one's peers is questioned. Reflecting on such experiences and their hurt, one of our respondents explained:

So it happened in public and it happened while other people who had been on that plane with me, they're walking past. That happened in my home city so there could have been people who knew me. And that, that then again it comes down to self-consciousness, it's like how I felt other people are perceiving me by being pulled over and being questioned, you know? (Male, 40s, businessperson).

As Honneth (2004) argues, central to recognition and to the rights and entitlements this entails, is a person's ability to "appear in public without shame" (p.355, cited in McLaughlin, Phillimore, & Richardson, 2011, p.3). When one is 'othered' by societal representatives in public, others are routinely complicit in this 'othering' and this can be especially painful. Indeed, Neuhausser (2011) goes so far as to argue that it is the sanctioning by broader society of one's exclusion at the hands of societal representatives that constitutes 'collective' humiliation. Yet, for all that the wider public may be drawn into the othering process, we need to remember that it is the actions of the powerful that instigate the process and again, if we are to understand the social dynamics to the minority's experience, we need to consider the practices of the powerful.

Finally, the sense of alienation associated with this humiliation is typically conceived of as impacting upon one's relationship with majority-group members – those with whom membership is claimed, but has been denied. But in our interviews we also found evidence that Muslims were also isolated from other (British) Muslims because they were keen to present themselves in terms of other identities and hence distance themselves from anything, and anybody, which might make it easier to group them as marginal. That is to say, they are cut-off from the very people with whom in the context of airports they share a common

experience and they are thus denied the agency that comes from the recognition of this shared experience and the possibility of support and solidarity.

The consequences of misrecognition, disrespect, and humiliation

There is a considerable literature that identifies an ‘inertia effect’ of humiliation where, as a consequence of believing oneself to be powerless, people fail to act on their own (or their group’s) behalf (Ginges & Atran, 2008). Certainly, there is evidence in our research that in the immediacy of the airport context people’s awareness of their own powerlessness was psychologically and behaviourally consequential. In common with so much literature on minority experiences of policing (e.g., Fine et al. 2003; Mythen, Walklate, & Khan, 2009), participants reported anxiety and hyper-vigilance where every look and every gesture was registered and subject to interpretation. As a corollary participants reported an acute awareness of their own behaviour and their efforts to modify their appearance and behaviour in order to render themselves less visibly Muslim. Some spoke of adjusting what they wore, the way they carried their bag, their gait. They also spoke of trying to avoid interactions with airport authorities and fellow passengers through avoiding eye contact. Finally, where avoidance of interactions with airport authorities was impossible, withholding of information and even in some instances lying (even over mundane topics) were deemed necessary where to do otherwise was felt to place oneself or others at unwarranted risk. So, for instance, one respondent failed to divulge who he was visiting overseas because he mistrusted the authorities’ competence to discern who is and who is not a threat.

We do not mean to suggest that this was the full story. We also found evidence of the confident assertion of rights by some business people and the cocky cheekiness of some young males. Thus, we can see that these immediate behavioural responses are very varied.

But, what threads through their accounts, is their awareness that they cannot—in the words of the participant below—simply go about “daily business” or act with real authenticity. As a result, relationships with both authorities and with other members of the majority group were compromised. In the words of one participant, it:

makes you feel as if you’re always going to be a suspect. [] It makes you feel as if everyone else has got the right to go about their daily business, but you don’t. [] So it makes you, it’s almost as if you’re hemmed in, you’re, caged. (Male, 20s, professional)

Although this respondent was speaking about how his airport experiences had affected him, we see here the suggestion that such experiences merge with a more general sense of how one’s positioning entails a loss of freedom. We found in our interviews that people often moved between discussing the airport context to discussing contact with other societal authorities. Although we cannot conclude a causal relationship from this, it does raise the possibility that people’s experiences in airports may be of consequence beyond the airport. At the very least, there is a sense in which people’s experiences in airports may be viewed as emblematic of a more generalized Muslim experience with societal authorities. It may even be invoked when making sense of wider relations with authorities. We turn now to the issue of whether the experience of withdrawal from societal authorities in the airport is relevant in other contexts.

Wider consequences

There is considerable research on policing black youth (and black cultural spaces) showing that, where people feel treated as a dangerous ‘other’ they may feel alienated from the system

(Body-Gendrot, 2010; Talbot & Bose, 2007) and less willing to give information to the judicial process (Viki et al. 2006). Our own research hints at similar issues. For instance, following his description of a particularly humiliating experience at the airport, a community elder with a history of working with the police observed: “you help them and help them and then they treat you like someone who was really a criminal, and then I reduce my contact with the [] police” (Male, 50s, professional). He later made explicit what he sees as the link between how he and others are treated at the airports and a general withdrawal of Muslim community support for societal authorities: “every time I return you stop me, every time you stop me, so people lose cooperation”.

With regard to the withdrawal of support for societal authorities, this does not mean that people automatically disengage with majority society and dis-identify as British. Indeed, a number of our participants reported that non-Muslims’ doubts about Muslims constituted a ‘wake-up call’, challenging Muslims to engage further with the wider society. That is, we can identify in our research a range of responses to being misrecognised, including the need to act as ambassadors for Islam (see also Bakalian & Bozorgmehr, 2009; Hopkins, Greenwood, & Birchall, 2007). There was also evidence for people engaging in ‘conventional’ avenues of protest to directly challenge the authorities (including on the issue of stop and search in airports: Hopkins & Blackwood, 2011). Again, rather than reflecting a disavowal of Britishness, people’s politicisation was explained in terms that reflected a strong dual identification where one’s national identity warranted the pursuit of their minority rights (see also Klandermans, van der Toorn, & van Stekelenburgh, 2008; Simon & Grabow, 2010; Simon & Ruhs, 2008).

Personal experience, social networks, and leadership

Within people's personal experiences of airport interactions we have the ingredients for withdrawal and disengagement but also for (collective) grievance formation and politicization. Although personal experiences of humiliation may be isolating, they can also connect people to the stories that circulate within communities. Just as one's personal experience may become part of a collective narrative articulated by others, so too one's understanding of one's own experience may be informed by others' stories. In people's personal accounts, the collective narrative was frequently alluded to. Indeed, the collective narrative was often the background 'given' against which one's personal experience was measured. This resonates with a literature that has emphasised the role of 'rumour and hearsay' and the 'accumulated folk wisdom of community experiences' (Jefferson, 1993, p. 38) in mediating personal experiences. Moreover, it resonates with the idea that people's personal experiences may play a central role in validating the authenticity of the collective narrative. That is, the personal can be used to lend weight to such narratives such that individuals may say to themselves "if this can happen to me and if this has this impact on me, then I can now believe that it happens to others and I can understand and even sympathise with others' anger and sense of alienation". Recent research with Turkish students (Simon & Reichert, 2010) shows that participants' personal experience of discrimination rendered them more sympathetic to others' experience and to non-normative forms of political action. Among our participants, some expressed understanding of the anger behind acts of defiance and radicalisation, and among those who saw themselves as leaders, there were reports of doubt as to where they should and could lead their community.

Conclusion

The logic to our analysis has been simple and the message for political psychology is equally simple. Theories that focus on the idiosyncratic vulnerabilities of individuals may

have some utility in some contexts. However, if our theories only ever focus on such individual-level factors, we must of necessity overlook other, more social dynamics. Moreover, even if we address minority group processes but overlook the role of the majority group in shaping those processes, there is much we will miss. Most obviously we will overlook how the perspective and practices of the majority – especially their representatives (e.g., the police) – have an impact upon people who do not exhibit the individual vulnerabilities that so much theory focuses on. As group representatives these authority figures' behaviour has considerable symbolic significance in communicating who belongs and on what terms, and as the data reviewed above show, their everyday practices make such understandings tangible and concrete in minority group members' lives. How minority group members act on such experiences is not determined by mechanistic processes and hence is not easy to predict. Indeed, whilst amongst our respondents there was a shared narrative about what happens in airports, there was frequently quite impassioned disagreement about what this meant and how one should respond. Much will depend on the debates within minority communities and the creativity with which diverse social actors offer meaningful analyses of their grievances (see Hopkins & Kahani-Hopkins, 2004, 2009).

Societal representatives and authorities may be ill-equipped to influence such debates. Indeed attempts at direct intervention often serve only to discredit the position that is espoused. However, by looking instead to their own practices and changing these, the authorities can shape the context of debate within the minority community and create less favourable conditions for those propagating a message of disengagement. If the predominant minority experience is of inclusion rather than othering, respect rather than humiliation, trust rather than surveillance, then, in turn, it becomes harder to make a convincing case that Europe's Muslims may be *in* Europe, but not *of* Europe.

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